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Moscow's View on Victory in General Nuclear War [1]

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made that evidence indicates "some Soviet leaders hold the view that victory in general nuclear war is possible." Soviet assertions, military doctrine, and strategic programs are cited as justifying the conclusion, which appears in both the DCI's and the Intelligence Community's versions of the Estimate's key judgments. Alternative views are presented, centering on the question of what the Soviets might envisage as a victory in such a conflict. There are differing viewpoints on this issue within the National Foreign Assessment Center as well, and the following two articles express views held by analysts in the Office of Political Analysis. The first provides a succinct counterstatement to the Estimate judgment. The second examines one of the key items of evidence related to that judgment.

If the conclusion is meant to convey the idea that some Soviet leaders *may* believe the USSR might prevail in general nuclear war, then it may be correct, but we cannot conclude *from evidence* that this is so. The same conclusion about the possibility of victory could be reached by Soviet analysts about US leaders, although the US defense programs, doctrine, and assertions that could be cited as evidence would be different. Even if it is correct, the important analytical question is what do Soviet leaders believe are conditions that would permit victory and whether they believe such conditions exist or could be developed. The opinion held by Soviet leaders about the efficacy of Soviet military capabilities and programs would be highly relevant evidence on this point, but we have no reason to believe that their judgment is such that they believe US leaders will be unable or unwilling to use US capabilities effectively.

[1] Reprinted from *USSR and Eastern Europe Review*, 23 July 1981.

Soviet leaders see military forces and programs as necessary for a variety of policy aims and contingencies, but not as *sufficient* to achieve victory in general nuclear war. They build forces, particularly strategic nuclear forces, in the first instance to deter nuclear attack on the USSR and in the second to enable the USSR to fight a nuclear war as effectively as possible and thus give the USSR the best chance, conditions permitting, of prevailing. Thus, they prepare forces to fight in a nuclear environment and will try to "win" if general nuclear war comes (though what they consider "victory" in such circumstances is not known). They may envisage theoretical possibilities of victory—for example, if US leaders were to lose their nerve or give up. It remains to be demonstrated, however, that this approach to dealing with a contingency rests on a real expectation or belief on the part of the Soviet leaders that their current or planned forces, by virtue of their size or characteristics, are capable of forcing a *military* victory over the United States in general nuclear war.

Soviet leaders are still committed to the worldwide "victory" of their political system and have at times maintained that even a nuclear war would not necessarily deny them this goal. But they rest whatever hopes they may have of prevailing in such a war on political, social, economic, and ideological strengths as much as on military ones—the same combination of factors that they think would enable them to prevail in the absence of such a war. Statements by top Soviet leaders over the years have explicitly argued against the notion that general nuclear war could serve any rational policy aim for any state. Achieving victory, they argue, certainly cannot be counted upon. The most probable way Soviet leaders envisage their strategic nuclear forces contributing to victory in a major military conflict would be by

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deterring US strategic nuclear forces and thus *avoiding* general nuclear war, while other Soviet forces prevail in *other* kinds of conflict in Eurasia.

Although the difference of view between the judgment expressed in the Estimate and the argument presented in this article may appear abstruse, its implications for US policy are potentially significant. To impute incorrectly a belief in the possibility of victory in general nuclear war to Soviet political and military leaders could, for instance, lead US policymakers to be overcautious in a future crisis or to foreclose certain policy options unnecessarily because they overestimated the boldness of the Soviet leaders.

The above article is Secret.

Rereading Marshal Ogarkov's 1980 "Victory" Statement With Soviet Eyes [1]

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Soviet President Brezhnev's ringing assertion in Kiev on 9 May that "the means of mass annihilation have now acquired such a scope that their use would put into question the existence of . . . the whole of modern civilization" came as no surprise to Western ears. This statement has been an official Soviet position since at least Brezhnev's Tula speech in January 1977. It was reiterated most recently in an article in the main party theoretical journal by Soviet General Staff Chief Ogarkov.

Soviet spokesmen claim that their public statements regarding the possibility of victory in general nuclear war have two aims. First, they correct an allegedly widespread and potentially dangerous misunderstanding in the United States of Soviet thinking on this question. They further assert that this misunderstanding derives from outdated Soviet military writings of the 1960s, such as Marshal Sokolovsky's *Military Strategy*. Second, they give the lie to allegedly willful US distortions of the views of Soviet leaders by placing Moscow's "true" views prominently on the public record.

Differing Viewpoints

As part of the Soviet campaign to counter such reputed misunderstandings or distortions, some Soviet Americanologists have recommended that US officials consult such important "contemporary expressions" of the Soviet position as an article on military strategy which appeared last year under Marshal Ogarkov's name.[2] Precisely this article, however, with its discussion of the "objective possibilities" for achieving victory in nuclear war, appeared to many US readers to arouse or confirm their worst suspicions about Soviet intentions.

Probably nothing better illustrates the perceptual divide separating the United States from the Soviet Union than the fact that the very article they recommend as an antidote should have had exactly the contrary effect. To explain this irony, we have to reread the pertinent Ogarkov passage with Soviet rather than American eyes:

> At the foundation of Soviet military strategy lies the proposition that the Soviet Union, based on the principles of its policy, will not employ these (nuclear) weapons first. It is also opposed in principle to the use of weapons of mass destruction. . . . Soviet military strategy proceeds from the fact that if a nuclear war is foisted upon the Soviet Union, then the Soviet people and their armed forces must be ready for the most severe and prolonged trials. In this case, the Soviet Union, and the fraternal socialist states, in comparison to the imperialist states, will have definite advantages stemming from the just goals of the war, and the advanced nature of their social and state systems. This creates objective possibilities for them to achieve victory. For the realization of these possibilities, however, the timely and many-sided preparation of the country and armed forces is necessary."

Ogarkov's Probable Intention

It is noteworthy that the two objective conditions he cites for the possibility of achieving victory in nuclear war are "social" ones: the force of a just cause, and the inherent superiority of the Soviet (and "socialist") state and social order. Also, although Ogarkov is explicit regarding the necessary social conditions for

[1] Reprinted from *USSR and Eastern Europe Review*, 13 August 1981.
[2] N. V. Ogarkov, "Military Strategy," *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 1980, pp. 555-565.

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the possibility of achieving such a victory, he does not say that these conditions are both necessary and *sufficient* for its actual attainment. He indirectly acknowledges that there are other conditions that would have to be considered in any full discussion of the conditions permitting victory. Thus, the conclusion of the statement in question hints at more "practical," but still not necessarily adequate, requirements: "For the realization of these possibilities, however, the timely and many-sided preparation of the country and armed forces is necessary."

Ogarkov does not enter into a discussion (nor would he be expected to) of such practical matters as adversary capabilities, or of what "victory" in nuclear war would look like in political, military, or even gross physical terms such as numbers of casualties or economic costs. As is traditional in Soviet declaratory statements of military doctrine, he subordinates his comments on military issues to his political responsibility. His intention is to approach the frontier of his professed subject matter—actual Soviet military strategy—but not to profane this strategy by revealing it in a public, political forum.

Thus, Ogarkov's intention in raising the issue as he does is consciously limited. He is reminding the primary addressees, the Soviet people and armed forces, that their cause is just, that the historical forces shaping world events and social orders favor the USSR, and that the possibilities for achieving victory can be actualized if they are prepared. He is also, in effect, saying that the USSR harbors the "objective possibilities" for victory only *in potentia*. The implied emphasis is on the transition from "objective" possibilities for conditions to those that are both "objective" and "subjective," that is, realized by the Soviet people and the armed forces. In the idiom of the Soviet theoretician, Ogarkov is advising his careful readers that only what is simultaneously both "objective" and "subjective" is not merely theoretically true, but also practically existent.

On the basis of such an interpretation, Soviet commentators concluded that Ogarkov had discussed this question on a purely theoretical plane, exclusively in terms of the social advantages accruing to the "socialist" states. Thus, they have professed to non-Soviet interlocutors that they find his formulation cautious and unspectacular. When some Americans saw it as confirming that some Soviet leaders believe in the possibility of victory in nuclear war, they sprang to defend their interpretation of Ogarkov's words. That defense took the form of an attack upon the United States for allegedly calculating its own military advantage in terms of the concrete effect on precise military, economic, and administrative targets of accurate missiles designed to ensure victory in nuclear war.[3]

Attacks on US Interpretations

In defending their interpretation of Ogarkov's statement, Soviet commentators are careful not to argue by denying that what he said publicly is a true reflection of what, or all that Ogarkov believes. To do so would not only be impolitic, it would be undemonstrable and unconvincing. Nor do they enter into what would be a futile shouting match with American military experts about the true or ultimate purpose of Soviet military practice.

Soviet commentators know that their official line proscribes public assertions that the USSR will win a general nuclear war with the United States. They are thus confident that no objective analysis of Ogarkov's "Military Strategy" article can unearth what its author meant to conceal: namely, what he as a professional military officer "really" thinks about the USSR's prospects for victory. Therefore, they essentially try to demonstrate that Ogarkov's US critics fill his prudent silences on this question with expressions of fears that arise in the context of the US domestic debate.

In the final analysis, the difference between US and Soviet interpretations of Ogarkov's remarks appears to be rooted in a more fundamental gap in their calculations of the relationship between open declarations of intent and political and military advantage. While in the United States it is believed that deterrence credibility is furthered by public declarations of US military capabilities and resolve, in the USSR silence is held to be a better bastion than speech.

The above article is Unclassified.

[3] See, for example, Lev Semeyko, "Strategic Illusions," *Novoye Vremya*, 12 December 1980.

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